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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2899  
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RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4936  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 002856

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DEA: OEL/TOTH, BLANCO

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#)

SUBJECT: THREATS TO KICK OUT DEA/MIL: REAL OR RHETORIC?

REF: A. LA PAZ 2726

[1](#)B. LA PAZ 2712

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Bolivian President Evo Morales caused a stir with his confused calls to kick out foreign forces and barbs at U.S. counter-narcotics efforts October 8 and 9 (reftels). The cable is our assessment and effort to provide some context for the Washington audience to help navigate the "revolutionary" hyperbole and decipher the statements' true significance. So far, based on our continuing excellent working relationships with the military and police, it appears Evo will not follow through with action: Morales' overheated statements (below) are just the latest rhetorical explosion against us:

--October 9, Press Conference

Morales asserted it is a question of "national dignity" that U.S. "military" affiliated with counter-narcotics efforts would have to leave the country "soon," although he referred to non-military DEA agents and uniformed military interchangeably. "I am happily, finally terminating this ... no uniformed armed foreigners will operate here." Morales also announced Bolivia would "gradually" stop sending troops to the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), which he referred to as its former name, the School for the Americas (SOA). Morales asserted the institute teaches "high ranking officers to confront their own people, to identify social movements as their enemies." (Note: Top-level military commanders have told us that dispute Morales' statement, plans are proceeding for Bolivians to go to WHINSEC. End Note.)

--October 8, At an event honoring Che Guevara's death Morales emphasized a "global revolution ... against inhumane capitalism" and urged other Latin American governments to prohibit stationing of "imperialistic" military bases. He added a new Bolivian Constitution would "not permit any American military base in Bolivian territory" and that "the empire is raising arms against the people; the empire wants military bases in Latin America."

¶2. (C) Veteran Evo watchers caution against taking Evo's statements at face value and discount the likelihood of any imminent withdrawals of U.S. officials. They heard similar rants from Evo about kicking the U.S. out in February of 2006, shortly after taking office in January, and nothing changed on a working level. In both cases the audience was Morales' politically radical cocalero base in Chapare and the caustic remarks had followed an event that "worked him up." This year it was the 40th anniversary of Che's death. Prior to the 2006 comments, Morales had returned from a December 2005 trip visiting leading global leftists. Considering getting "Yankees" to leave the coca-producing department of Chapare was a constant theme during Morales' political career leading up to 2006, it is somewhat surprising he has not brought up the topic more often.

Note of Caution: Changes Since February 2006  
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¶3. (C) Although we have heard most of this before with little or no consequence to our work in Bolivia, Embassy DEA, MILGRP, NAS, DAO, and ECOPOL agree the October remarks should be taken a bit more seriously because of changes since February 2006. It is not the same political environment as February 2006: the Bolivian Government is no longer in a honeymoon period and is rather confronted by many difficult domestic political and economic issues and stronger domestic criticism. Morales' own hard-left government supporters may press him on rhetorical pledges after nearly two years in power. The Bolivian Government has also taken real and concrete steps in the last three months to distance Bolivia from the U.S., such as onerous new visa requirements for U.S. citizens, criticism of U.S. aid programs and opening relations with Iran.

Focus on Tripwires, Not Bombast  
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¶4. (C) MILGRP, DAO, NAS, and DEA sections are focused on working relationships instead of public threats. They assess the Embassy will know the threats are for real when our interlocutors, typically eager to work with us, suddenly stop returning our calls, cancel programs, or confirm that government plans ask us to leave. Anything short of that is bombast, which we should take seriously, but put in the proper political and historical context of past remarks. Our Bolivian DEA, NAS, and military counterparts at senior and working levels continue to work with us in a routine manner. The Bolivian Police Commander and Counter-Narcotics Police Commander indicated to our NAS Director October 15 that they were concerned the comments would irritate us to the point we would withdraw support or break relations, not that the Bolivian Government would initiate a break. Commanding General of the Armed Forces told MILGRP Commander the comments would result in no/no action as U.S. support of the police and armed forces is too important for Bolivia. DEA Deputy Regional Director adds that Morales is not likely to sever U.S. counter-narcotics aid because politically he needs to show his dedication to the drug war with the international community. Some suspect Evo may be hoping to insult us in order to provoke us into the pull-out he desires.

Evo's 80s Flashbacks and Incoherent Threats  
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¶5. (C) Morales' past experiences as a coca grower and union organizer during a very rough chapter in the Bolivian counter-narcotics fight (Operation Snowcap) can not be overemphasized when considering his current remarks. Morales' call to oust vaguely-defined U.S. forces associated with the drug war seems to be pointed at DEA given that DEA agents do wear camouflage when they join Bolivian troops in the field. As a precaution, DEA has temporarily suspended this practice and dramatically reduced joint missions with Bolivian police units until the dust settles.

